

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

Digging the Deep Ditch

Standard: II. Time, Continuity, and Change
III. People, Places, and Environments
IX. Global Connections

Grade Level: 9–12

Objectives: The student will:

- Record the earliest expressions of interest in a Central American canal
- Read a document and pick out the chronological events
- Give an opinion about non-prior knowledge

Time: 1 class period

Materials: Document: **1839** *The Proposed Ship Canal Connecting the Atlantic & Pacific*
Exercises: *Historical "Lining" of the Proposed Canal*
Textbooks
Internet access, if needed

Procedures:

Setting the Stage

Most students—and even some teachers—only think about the building of a Panama Canal during the time of Theodore Roosevelt. Actually, ideas, surveys, and debate about a “ditch” across the isthmus of Central America had a long history.

Students will use the document to “dig” into the Canal’s past and discover the many attempts to make the dream a reality and build a shortcut to California, China, and Japan many years before President Roosevelt’s day.

Students will then be asked to reflect on the fact that they didn’t know this “hidden” story before—and that they only viewed the Canal from an American perspective.

1. Give students the document, *On the Proposed Ship Canal Connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific*, and the Exercise, *Historical Lining of the Proposed Canal*.
2. Ask students individually to read the document and fill-in the “lining” of the canal.
3. After they have finished the exercise, have each confer with another student to compare notes on what they discovered.
4. Have a short discussion with the whole class on what they discovered that

they *did not* know about the development of the Panama Canal. Then ask them to turn to the Panama Canal section (use the index) in their U. S. History textbooks and see how much of the Canal's past is explained.

5. Discuss why the information in the text does not include all the other "historical lining" of the building of this canal. Do the texts only give one point of view? Why?

6. Have student put two (2) pieces of paper side-by-side on their desks. On the right-hand sheet of paper: Have the students write a review of what they've learned. They should comment on why it's important to know all the facts and on how primary source documents can change our understanding of an event—and why textbooks cannot include everything.

7. After completing their written remarks, use the left-hand sheet of paper to draw a visual representation of what they just wrote. Hand in both sheets for the teacher to review. Choose some representative visuals, but return them to the students to keep in notebooks for testing and study purposes.

8. Include a question on the next test concerning the length of time and effort of many countries to build a canal across the isthmus of Central America. ■